



# VIETNAM VETERANS AGAINST THE WAR, INC

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Dear VVAW Supporter,

I'd like to thank you for your continued support for Vietnam Veterans Against the War (VVAW) over the years. Without your involvement we could not successfully continue the important peace and social justice work that we began back in 1967. My name is Bill Branson and I currently serve on the VVAW Board. I am the Board liaison with the Military Counseling Project. I served in the US Army Security Agency, doing tours in Panama (1967-68) and Vietnam (1968-69). My primary job was as an O5H-20 Morse Interceptor, but I also worked as a ground radio operator for AR-DF planes. My opposition to the war was an offshoot from an intense hatred of the military, particularly the "Lifers" who made our lives miserable. The murder of students at Kent State solidified and directed my hatred into action. I joined the San Bernardino, CA chapter of VVAW and participated in Operation Dewey Canyon III. Since then I have helped staff the Chicago VVAW National Office, led security for Operation Dewey Canyon IV in 1982, traveled to Nicaragua with the VVAW delegation in the 1980s, served as a bodyguard for progressive comrades from Nicaragua and Colombia, and organized and led security for Iraq Veterans Against the War's (IVAW) Winter Soldier II in 2008.

When I attended Dewey Canyon III in the spring of 1971, I joined over a thousand Vietnam veterans in returning our medals from Vietnam. The events of Dewey Canyon III galvanized the anti-war movement and brought newfound national media attention to the veteran anti-war movement. Forty-one years later, IVAW carried on the legacy as they returned their medals from the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan outside of the NATO Summit in Chicago on May 20, 2012. **VVAW's work is just as important today as it was when we came together in 1967, and marched at Dewey Canyon III in 1971. Without your support, we could not continue the struggle for peace and justice for service members and veterans of all generations.**

IVAW, alongside with Afghans for Peace, led a peaceful and well-organized demonstration against NATO and its continuation of the war in Afghanistan. In addition to VVAW's ongoing financial support to IVAW, VVAW helped support the march on the NATO Summit. Long-time VVAW member Barry Romo lent decades of experience in helping keep the vets' contingent secure from cops, media and provocateurs by aiding in security. The demonstration culminated with fifty Iraq and Afghanistan veterans returning their medals, followed by a moment of silence. VVAW also provided support at the march through the work of our Military Counselors – Ray and Hans. They made sure veteran participants knew that VVAW's free military counseling services were available to them, whether they needed them during the NATO Summit events or afterwards.

**Your continued support for VVAW has allowed us to carry on the fight for Veterans, Peace and Justice. Not only have we been able to fight for Vietnam-era veterans, but for all generations of GIs and veterans. VVAW provides both financial support and other resources for IVAW's organizing work as well as operating our Military and Veterans Counseling Service.** VVAW employs two military counselors – Ray Parrish, our Benefits Counselor, and Johanna (Hans) Buwalda, our Licensed Clinician – whose specialties complement each other to provide comprehensive services for those in need, whether they are seeking counseling, discharge upgrades, help with VA claims, or a combination of those services.

Hans has counseled several clients who experienced trauma during combat. Their experiences highlight how complex war trauma is due to the feelings of guilt and shame. Many soldiers participate in or witness events that go against everything they once knew to be right, just, and true. When these fundamental truths are under attack, soldiers experience both the effects of trauma and what is often called "moral injury." Oftentimes, soldiers are put in this situation when

they are given orders that go against everything they once believed in. For example, Paul served in combat in Afghanistan as a gunner on convoy missions. Convoys are often targeted, so when children come on to the road asking for food, soldiers fear that they may be decoys or unknowingly have an IED on them. In Paul's experience, he was the gunner on the last truck of the convoy. His CO (commanding officer) ordered him to shoot the children as they approached, and he followed the orders he was given. He now lives riddled with guilt, unable to look at himself and sought out counseling to help process the traumatic event on that convoy so he can begin to live his life again.

Cheryl also served in Afghanistan on convoy missions. She was driving the truck when she saw a child ahead on the road. Her CO ordered her to keep driving and the convoy ran over the child. Cheryl threw up on the spot. She is haunted by the feelings, the sounds, and the guilt she carries from that day. She feels that she lost who she was that very moment they ran over the child. While she may never be able to forgive herself, by working with Hans she may be able to learn to live with herself. She also is working on being and accepting the person she is today: the person who had the kind of experiences she had. In wars where soldiers are given unthinkable orders and find themselves fearing children because of a possible IED attack, everything they know is thrown out the window. Understanding not only what these veterans went through, but also how they view their morals, and even the morality of the war they were sent to fight in is key in being able to provide the most useful services for them.

**VVAW Military and Veterans Counseling is unique because these services are free of charge, confidential, and open to current service members, veterans from all eras regardless of discharge status, and their loved ones. Without your support, VVAW could not continue our Military Counseling Service that provides support to all generations of veterans.**

As part of Hans' work, she spends a lot of time training other providers to help broaden the network of providers across the county who can not only help document a veteran's case for discharge upgrade requests to the appropriate standards of the VA, but also understand the complexities of working with GIs and veterans who have experienced trauma and moral injury. She also has had the opportunity to present her work at conferences. In May, she presented "Trauma and the Moral Injuries of War" at the Institute of Clinical Social Work conference on "The Emotional Wounds of War." In June, she will be speaking at The Soldier's Project National Conference on "Reaching Out To Veterans." In September, she will be speaking at the American Public Health Association's Annual Meeting, along with VVAW Board member Ann Hirschman, a registered nurse.

Once again, if I could thank every one of you personally, I would. Without your support, VVAW would not be able to continue these programs that make a difference in the lives of so many. We appreciate that in these hard economic times, you can't donate every time we ask you. **Every dollar does count, so please support us today with a tax-deductible donation. Your continued support keeps VVAW going.**

Sincerely,

*William Branson*

Bill Branson, VVAW National Coordinator

I am sending Vietnam Veterans Against the War \$35 \$50 \$100 \$250 \$500 Other to support its work for peace and for decent benefits for all veterans. Donations to VVAW are tax deductible. You can also donate online at [www.vvaw.org](http://www.vvaw.org), a one-time or monthly donation.

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